

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Danielle Castro and I am a resident of New HAVEN and student at Yale College. I am Peruvian American and immigrated to the United States with my family when I was six years old.

I stand in support of HB 6616: "An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status". Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we need. If Connecticut wants a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving and growing workforce that is ready to meet the needs of our future, Connecticut must ensure that these individuals up to age of 26 have access to health coverage.

Although I was fortunate enough to have parents with stable jobs, I faced many challenges along my educational trajectory. Any sixth grader in my elementary school's advanced academic program could place into advanced math in middle school if they scored at least a 90 on the aptitude test. I got a 73. My family hadn't known about the test's significance and hadn't thought to prepare me. My math teacher, Ms. Bodenhofer, somehow seeing or believing in my potential, wrote to the school board and managed to get me into the advanced math class. I didn't know it at the time, but had I not been in that advanced math class, I wouldn't even have been eligible to apply to the magnet high school that I later attended, the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, or TJHSST, a high school which I found out about years after my peers. Some of these classmates had been in prep classes for its admission exam since second grade, when I was still learning English. So many people interceded for me throughout my trajectory, and without them, I wouldn't be where I am today, about to graduate with a 4.0 GPA from Yale in four years with both a bachelor's and master's degree in Biochemistry, and a minor in Global Health.

And yet, many people in the Latino immigrant community may never have these same educational or job opportunities. And it all begins with health. Had I not had access to health throughout my time in high school or in college, I certainly would not have been able to accomplish what I have. Many of my family members have immigrated to this country for better healthcare. My great-grandmother was able to get care for her colon cancer here, and my own mother fell ill with pneumonia when I was in high school and recovered after being hospitalized for months. I believe healthcare is a human right, and people in other countries are just as deserving of it as the U.S.-born citizens are. Without the love and support of my family, I also would not be where I am today. Besides being the moral thing to do, providing healthcare to immigrants will also pave the way for reducing educational disparities and consequently economic inequality among immigrants, with benefits for all of American society. I hope and pray that, just like my teacher Ms. Bodenhofer, you will intercede to help immigrants like me and my family be healthy.

I support HB 6616 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation out of committee in its current form - to expand HUSKY access to age 26. Our work does not end with expanding access up to age 12 nor with expanding access up to age 18. And that work must continue this year by expanding HUSKY access up to age 26. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time,
Danielle Castro